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The symbolic dimensions of wartime rape : a case study of Kamanyola Community, Bukavu/South-Kivu Province (Democratic republic of Congo).

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ABSTRACT

To understand the persistence of wartime rape that the DRC has experienced during the sixteen years old civil war, this study undertakes a critical analysis of the concept of 'symbolic violence' as proposed by Bourdieu. I have suggested that this concept [symbolic violence] as developed by Bourdieu needs other dimensions of definition in order to be applied to other social crises outside the western world. Shaping a link between wartime rape and its symbolic dimensions enables us to clearly articulate that the symbolic order brought through the practice of wartime rape by perpetrators does not remain unchallenged by the dominated who are direct and indirect victims of wartime rape. For this purpose, data were collected from ordinary community members, community leaders; a doctor and nurse form Panzi Hospital, an army General, a lawyer and some NGOs members working in the area of study (Kamanyola)through in-depth interviews. Observation and document analysis have also been used in the process of data collection. As a result the study found that wartime rape, at first, is a threat that perpetrators use to impose their own symbolic power upon males from the enemy groups through the rape of females from the same enemy groups. Therefore, this physical attack [war rape] against females impacts the victims as individuals, the community and the whole nation. This helps to suggest that physical violence is also symbolic violence. This is rendered possible through social and cultural patriarchal norms shared by both victims and perpetrators. As a result, family and community ties as well as marriage – as constitutive elements of the community's symbolic order – are directly fractured by wartime rape. Forcing women to be economically unproductive was another strategy to undermine community ties which were built through community-based activities. Secondly, the strategic use of war rape comes to counter the idea of symbolic violence as being just soft or an invisible violence but under some circumstances a symbolic violence might produce physical harm.Thirdly, the study found that, patriarchy as the dominant social and cultural order is resisted by the dominated (women respondents in majority) now that it is associated to wartime rape. Because of this, I proposed that symbolic orders are not always taken for granted; they maybe resisted by the dominated. Based on the findings, this research report advocates for a more gender inclusive policy to encourage women to participate in the making of decisions which concern their lives as main victims of wartime rape in DRC generally and in Kamanyola in particular.

Key words: Wartime rape, Physical violence, Symbolic violence [order], Bourdieu, Power.